

Impressions of Life on the Prairie.

Mrs. Gray and Miss Janes have told you something of our delightful time in the beautiful towns in the East, and I have been asked to give you my impressions of prairie life in the West. By the kindness of the Executive Committee, I was permitted, at the conclusion of the meetings in Toronto, to prolong my stay in Canada, and was thus enabled to spend a fortnight with my brother on his farm in Western Manitoba.

As we drove along in the light buggy on the evening of my arrival, the little town of Elkhorn—with its straight, wide, dusty road, its tall stores on either side, its post office, which was more like a ticket office, and its queer little Chinese laundry—was soon left behind, and after crossing the railway line, we were out on the open prairie. Though in the train by day it had been excessively hot, the evenings are always cold, and I found I was very glad of the warm cape which my brother's kind friends in Elkhorn had insisted on lending me when we left them after tea for our 8 miles drive. The glorious invigorating air, the immensity of space, the solitude and the silence of the prairie were all the more impressive by force of contrast with the recent heat of Toronto, the crowded meetings, and the "much speaking."

Very soon we were on what my brother called "my track." To my untrained eyes the track was only faintly visible, and they never think of taking lights in the buggies. The stars shone brightly overhead; and on the low-lying parts of the ground the fireflies almost dazzled you with their brilliance, and you began to wonder which was earth and which heaven. The prairie here is what is known as "The rolling prairie," and is to my mind much more beautiful, with its gentle undulations, than the absolutely flat prairie which I saw nearer Winnipeg and further north. It is diversified by what are known as "sloughs" (with my English accent, which I did my best to overcome while in Canada, I should have called them sloughs) and "bluffs." A slough is anything from a mud bog to a large pond, and a bluff is a patch of light bushy poplar and low scrub, and may vary in extent from a few yards to several acres. The shooting in these parts is excellent. I myself saw many wild duck, prairie chickens, tern, and the strange diver bird. Next we came to "my farm," and here, as in most of the farms in that neighbourhood, there was no fence or land mark of any kind to show where it began. My brother has bought what is known as a half-section, that is, 320 acres. Alternate sections belong to the Dominion Government, and to the Canadian and Pacific Railway Company, but the free sections are now so far from the grain elevators that farmers find it difficult to get their wheat to the market. A section is 640 acres or one square mile, and 36 sections form a township. In the telephone directory it is easy to find the exact locality of any subscriber. My brother, for instance, is described as follows:—Ranch 29, township 10, section 36 N.E. It seemed most incongruous to hear the familiar

telephone bell in his little three-roomed shack right out on the prairie, and as it rings every time any one of the ten subscribers on his line is wanted, only with a different call for each, one heard it pretty often, and found oneself counting to see whether it rung the three short, one long, which was his call. The farmers use it not only for business purposes, for which it is invaluable, but also for a friendly chat, and I am sure it helps many a lonely one who is "baching it" to feel that he is less alone in the world. The prairie is, of course, quite devoid of trees, but the shack itself is protected by two rows of balm of Gilead trees at right angles, planted to form what is known as a "wind break."

A hundred acres were given up to the pasture field, and this was, of course, fenced in, to prevent the cattle straying into the wheat (which they will do if they possibly can) with a barbed wire fence, the poles for which were all cut from the bluff near by. The bluff also furnishes sufficient wood for the fires in the summer time, which is fortunate, seeing that coal sometimes is as much as 50s. a ton, though in the very severe winter weather with the thermometer often at 44 degs. below zero, coals have to be used to get sufficient heat. I was fortunate in visiting the prairie at a time when it was covered with wild flowers in their full mid-summer glory. Golden red lilies raised their stately heads amidst the tall grasses, wild roses, some of a much deeper shade than our hedge roses, grew thickly on low bushes quite near to the ground. There were marigolds, with dark-brown centres, harebells on their slender stems, carpets of white anemones, everlasting flowers, and endless others of which unfortunately I did not know the names. Many parts were covered with low bushes of the grey-green willow, which is said to be a sure sign of good wheat-growing ground.

All kinds of strange birds flew around, and Willy, the little lad of 13, from Dr. Barnardo's, who helps my brother in place of the usual "hired man," was only too glad to tell me all about their peculiar habits. There was the king bird, which, although quite a small bird, drives all the big ones, especially crows, before it; the red-winged blackbird, and also the yellow-crested variety; the cow-bird, which follows the cattle, the robin, a large bird like a thrush, whose only resemblance to our robin seems to be its red breast; the prairie lark, with its flute-like note, the wild canary, and the night hawk, whose nest is a stone, on which Willy triumphantly pointed out to me two stone-coloured eggs. Little brown gophers scuttle away from the track as you drive past. They are about the same size as squirrels, with flat, bushy tails. One day, when I was visiting a brother and sister from Brandon, who had recently built a shack, and only just begun "breaking" the ground, a little gopher came and sat quite close to my feet, enjoying a piece of bacon rind, which it held daintily in its little front paws. They are, however, very destructive to the crops.

While my brother was out with the horses, ploughing summer fallow, Willy did all the odd jobs, which would otherwise fall to the woman, such as milking, butter-making, drawing water

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